

THEME 1: Interaction of Europe and the World

Overarching Questions:

- * Why have Europeans sought contact and interaction with other parts of the world?
- * What political, technological, and intellectual developments enabled European contact and interaction with other parts of the world?
- * How have encounters between Europe and the world shaped European culture, politics, and society?
- * What impact has contact with Europe had on non-European societies?

Beginning in the 15th century, European nations sent explorers into the world beyond the Mediterranean, establishing new shipping routes, trading stations, and, eventually, colonies in many parts of the globe. The motivations for these enterprises were complex and have been the subject of much historical debate. Were Europeans driven primarily by the desire for more direct and secure trade routes, by the pursuit of new commercial wealth, or by religious zeal — the desire to convert new peoples to Christianity? Whatever the motivations, these explorations created new, complex trade systems that profoundly affected European prosperity, patterns of consumption, commercial competition, and national rivalries. The activities and influence of Europeans varied in different parts of the world. In India and China, centers of high civilizations, Europeans remained on the periphery in trading stations for centuries. In Africa, they also established themselves on the coasts, trading with the indigenous populations of the interior. In the Americas, they created colonies and imposed their religious, social, and political institutions on the native peoples. Europeans also brought new diseases to the Americas, which hastened the collapse of the indigenous cultures on the two continents. However, cross-cultural influence flowed in both directions. The encounters with non-European peoples profoundly affected European trade, social life, and ideas.

With their American colonies and the global reach of their seafarers, Europeans helped to create a truly global trading system, introducing new foods (such as tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and corn) that changed the food cultures of China, India, and Europe. At the same time as Europe was experiencing the material consequences of its interaction with the world, European intellectuals began to describe and analyze the peoples and cultures with which they came into contact, as well as to collect and catalogue the flora and fauna they discovered. The use of “race” as a primary category for differentiating peoples coincided with the expansion of slavery, as Europeans sought a work force for overseas plantations; this categorization helped Europeans justify the slave system. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, the transatlantic slave trade became a central feature of the world economy, and millions of Africans were transported via the notorious “Middle Passage” to labor on plantations in the Americas. The vast and cruel slave system began to generate opposition in Europe beginning in the late 18th century. Abolitionists objected to the system on humanitarian and religious grounds. An important strand of Enlightenment thought — the belief in citizenship, popular sovereignty, equality, and liberty — promoted by the American and French Revolutions also contributed to the ideology of the abolitionist movements, and European states abolished the slave trade in the early 19th century. From the late 18th century to the era of decolonization, these Enlightenment principles influenced those who opposed Europe’s global domination.

Yet, this critique of colonialism did not have an immediate effect, given that the 19th century proved to be a

period of empire building. Driven by the needs of an industrial economy and nationalism, Europeans expanded their territorial control in Asia and Africa through warfare, the seizure of property, and, in some cases, immigration. In the late 19th century, the scale and pace of conquest intensified because of asymmetries in military technology, communications, and national rivalries among the Great Powers. In conquered territories, Europeans established new administrative, legal, and cultural institutions, and restructured colonial economies to meet European needs. These actions often led to resistance in colonial areas. Within Europe, exposure to new peoples and cultures influenced art and literature, and spurred on efforts to find a scientific basis for “racial” difference. Competition for colonies also destabilized the European balance of power and was a significant cause of World War I. In the mid–20th century, the rise of the United States as an economic and military power, two world wars, and the four-decades-long Cold War led to a decolonization movement that diminished Europe’s economic and diplomatic place in the world. At the end of the 20th century, Europe sought new ways of defining interactions among its own nations and with the rest of the world. At the same time, the migration of non-European people into Europe began to change the ethnic and religious composition of European society and to create uncertainties about European identity.

Learning Objectives

Students are able to ...

Relevant Topics in the Concept Outline

INT-1 Assess the relative influence of economic, religious, and political motives in promoting exploration and colonization.	1.4. I	Commercial and religious motivations
	1.4. III	Competition for trade
	2.1. III	Rivalry between Britain and France
	2.2. II	Worldwide economic network
	2.2. III	Commercial rivalries
	3.5. I	National rivalries; raw materials and markets
INT-2 Analyze the cultural beliefs that justified European conquest of overseas territories and how they changed over time.	4.1. VII	Post–World War I mandate system
	1.4. I	Christianity
	3.5. I	Cultural and racial superiority
	3.6. II	Social Darwinism
INT-3 Analyze how European states established and administered overseas commercial and territorial empires.	4.1. VII	Principle of national self-determination
	1.4. II	Technological advances
	1.4. III	Commercial networks
	2.2. II	Mercantilism; slave-labor system
	2.2. III	Diplomacy and warfare
	3.5. II	Industrial and technological developments
INT-4 Explain how scientific and intellectual advances — resulting in more effective navigational, cartographic, and military technology — facilitated European interaction with other parts of the world.	4.1. VII	Mandate system
	1.4. II	Technological advances
	3.1. III	New communication and transportation technologies
	3.5. II	Industrial and technological developments

INT-5 Evaluate the impact of the Columbian Exchange — the global exchange of goods, plants, animals, and microbes — on Europe's economy, society, and culture.	1.4. IV	Shift of economic power to Atlantic states; economic opportunities
	2.2. II	Agricultural, industrial, and consumer revolutions in Europe; expansion of slave-labor system
INT-6 Assess the role of overseas trade, labor, and technology in making Europe part of a global economic network and encouraging the development of new economic theories and state policies.	1.4. I	Access to gold, spices, and luxury goods; mercantilism
	1.4. III	Commercial and trading networks
	1.4. IV	Columbian Exchange
	2.2. II	European-dominated worldwide economic network; mercantilism
	2.3. III	Commercial rivalries
	3.1. III	New means of communication and transportation
	3.5. I	Search for raw materials and markets
	4.2. IV	Postwar reconstruction of industry and infrastructure; consumerism
	4.4. I	New communication and transportation technologies
INT-7 Analyze how contact with non-European peoples increased European social and cultural diversity and affected attitudes toward race.	1.4. IV	Expansion of slave trade
	2.1. IV	Slave revolt and independence of Haiti
	2.2. II	Expansion of transatlantic slave-labor system
	2.3. II	Increased exposure to representations of peoples outside Europe
	3.5. I	Ideology of cultural and racial superiority
	3.5. III	Imperial encounters with non-European peoples
	4.1. VII	National self-determination
	4.3. III	Increased immigration into Europe
	4.4. III	Anti-immigrant agitation and extreme nationalist political parties

INT-8 Evaluate the United States' economic and cultural influence on Europe and responses to this influence in Europe.	4.1. I	Emergence of United States as a world power
	4.1. II	Wilsonian idealism
	4.1. IV	Cold War; world monetary and trade systems and geopolitical alliances
	4.2. III	1929 stock market crash
	4.2. IV	Marshall Plan
	4.3. IV	United States' influence on elite and popular culture
	4.4. III	Green parties; revolt of 1968
INT-9 Assess the role of European contact on overseas territories through the introduction of disease, participation in the slave trade and slavery, effects on agricultural and manufacturing patterns, and global conflict.	1.4. IV	Columbian Exchange
	2.2. II	Slave trade and new consumer goods
	3.5. III	Imperial conflicts and alliances
	4.1. I	Cause of First World War
	4.1. IV	Cold War outside Europe
	4.1. VII	Decolonization
INT-10 Explain the extent of and causes for non-Europeans' adoption of or resistance to European cultural, political, or economic values and institutions, and explain the causes of their reactions.	2.1. IV	Influence of French Revolution
	3.5. I	Latin American revolutions
	3.5. III	Responses to imperialism
	4.1. VII	Independence movements and mandates
INT-11 Explain how European expansion and colonization brought non-European societies into global economic, diplomatic, military, and cultural networks.	1.4. I	Exploration motives and mercantilism
	1.4. III	Establishment of empires
	1.4. IV	Slave trade and new goods
	1.5. I	Money economy
	2.1. III	Colonial rivalry and warfare
	2.1. IV	Revolution across the Atlantic
	2.2. II	Slave trade
	2.2. III	Diplomacy and colonial wars
	3.5. I	Imperialist motives; racial Darwinism
	3.5. III	Responses and resistance to imperialism
	4.1. I	World War I outside Europe
	4.1. IV	Cold War outside Europe
	4.1. VII	Nationalism and decolonization
	4.3. III	Colonial emigration to Europe
	4.4. III	Guest workers